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Christians' Attachment to God and Mental Health

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Abstract

This study used a prospective design to examine the relationship between attachment to God and certain aspects of mental health on a Christian sample. 1265 participants responded to a survey which assessed their attachment to God, attachment to others, mental health variables, such as depression, positive and negative affect and well-being. Three to five months later, the same survey was re-administered to 437 of the initial participants who agreed to take part a second time. Hypotheses predicted that higher levels of anxious and avoidant attachment to God would be associated with poorer levels of mental health, that the results would remain significant after controlling for attachment to others and initial mental health, and that higher levels of stress would moderate the relationship between attachment to God and mental health variables. Findings provided support for a strong association between attachment to God and mental health, and a less strong association between avoidant attachment to God and mental health. Attachment to God showed stability over time, and stress only moderated the relationship between anxious attachment to God and well-being. This result remained significant after controlling for attachment to others and time 1 mental health.

For my precious Nathaniel

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Foreword

To begin with, I believe it is important to explain that my views are coloured by my Christian beliefs. In this thesis I will attempt to give a balanced view of the literature on spirituality, religion and mental health, however, I shall not make any claims of objectivity, as I find such a goal unattainable. Being a former atheist, I have experience of seeing the world without the lens of faith and I believe that faith in God, or the lack thereof, is a fundamental aspect of one's identity and influences the way one sees the world. Furthermore, the essence of one's relationship with God is that of affection and love and, in this sense, it is impossible to be objective about a person one loves deeply. So, my apologies to those who may find the views expressed here biased; I am certain they are, despite efforts taken to achieve neutrality.

This thesis will explore and discuss the relationship between Christians' attachment to God and their mental health. Chapter one provides a background and a rationale for the present study. Chapter two explores the relationship between religion and mental health. It begins with definitions of religion and spirituality, then proceeds to look at the link between psychology and religion, and examines the empirical evidence for the role of religion in mental health. After an overview of attachment theory, chapter three examines the implications of attachment for mental health. In chapter four, the concept of religion as an attachment process is discussed, introducing the empirical research which supports the validity of the attachment to God construct and the potential impact of attachment to God on mental health and well-being. Chapter five covers the

methodology of this study, chapter six presents the results and chapter seven discusses the findings.

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